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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 03 BAGHDAD 003874

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 11/26/2017
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [MOPS](#) [MARR](#) [IZ](#)
SUBJECT: MCNS NOVEMBER 25, 2007 ADDRESSES SPD, CLCS, AQI,
RETURNEES, FOREIGN FIGHTERS, MOI FMS FUNDING DELAYS

REF: BAGHDAD 03772

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Classified By: Ambassador Ryan C. Crocker for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

11. (C) Summary: The November 25 meeting of the Ministerial Council for National Security (MCNS) reviewed the situation of Concerned Local Citizen (CLC) groups' evolution and future, success to date against Al Qaeda in Iraq (AQI), protection of Iraqi refugees returning to Baghdad, dealing with Foreign Fighters, and recruiting and retaining talented professionals. PM Maliki and ForMin Zebari also briefed the group on the presentation of the Strategic Partnership Declaration (SPD) to the Council of Representatives (COR), which reportedly went well. End Summary.

CLCs

12. (S) Setting aside the agenda at the outset, PM Maliki opened the meeting by expressing reservations about the behavior of CLCs. Though he said he recognized their value, he laid out a series of questions challenging the utility and integrity of the CLCs. While eventually acknowledging that the CLCs had been effective against AQI, he questioned the need for any CLCs to be established in the southern part of Iraq or even in Baghdad. He also complained that the CLCs were being infiltrated by criminal elements, particularly those loyal to the old regime, which was unnerving the local population.

13. (S) Maliki then raised the spectre of sectarian-based violence just when the GOI was enjoying success in reducing sectarian violence. He expressed exasperation with the Iraqi Army's failure to assert control over the CLCs, further complaining that the CLCs saw themselves as subordinate to no one and able to act with impunity. The Commander of Iraqi Ground Forces, General Ali, echoed these remarks, saying that the groups had been supportive initially of counter-terrorist efforts but now had become independent armed groups that did not allow his forces into certain areas. Minister of Defense Abdul Qadr joined the chorus, saying the groups, formerly helpful to the IA, were becoming armed foes. He said a plan was needed to move personnel from the CLCs into the Iraqi Security Forces (ISF), either Army or Police, and stated that the MoI needs extra funding to bring the majority into the police forces.

14. (S) MNF-I Commanding General (CG) David Petraeus

responded vigorously, noting that the CLCs had been a major contributor to Iraqi security, thereby creating an opportunity for success that must not be lost. He observed that the Iraqi Ground Forces Commander was also dual-hatted as commander of operations in Diyala - an impossible situation that rendered him ineffective in both positions. He refuted the charge that the CLCs did not cooperate with the IA - in fact, brigade commanders report that the CLCs work closely with the ISF and Multi-National Force (MNF). Regarding allegations of wrongdoing by members of the CLCs, he insisted that these should be brought to the attention of the competent legal and police authorities on the ground for investigation and prosecution. In reply to the MOD's comment that a plan was needed, he reminded the MCNS that the Implementation and Follow-up Committee for National Reconciliation (IFCNR) was in place to vet the CLC members to place them into the Iraqi Police or Army, as had been agreed. A new plan was not needed - implementation of the plan to integrate some CLC members into the ISF and to provide education and training programs for the rest was needed.

15. (S) The CG also highlighted the failure of MOI to hire CLCs personnel even though MOI had a shortage of personnel and was not spending its budget. The CLC members are a reservoir of talent for the police force that should be tapped now. Commander of the Joint Forces Babkir Shawkt intervened that the CLCs had taken on Al Qaeda, at great personal costs and loss of life, and driven AQI out of their areas. It would be wrong to attack them or not integrate many of them into ISF. Friction between the ISF and the CLCs was due in part, he argued, to indiscipline in the police forces - MOI must discipline its members. The CHOD stated that all four primary commanders in Diyala are Shi'a (in a Sunni majority province) and the prudent step is to

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appoint a Sunni commander to one of those entities. CG concurred with CHOD's assessment, and added that Jaysh al-Mahdi (JAM) infiltration into MOI needed to be examined as rigorously as are the Sunni CLCs. He reiterated the important role CLCs had played in contributing to Iraqi progress.

16. (S) Maliki expressed deep reservations about the usefulness of the CLCs, ascribing the improvement in security to Iraqi forces. CG responded that success was due to a team effort - ISF, MNF, and the CLCs had all contributed to the improved security situation. Credit should be given to everyone by everyone, noting that MNF goes out of its way to highlight the successful efforts of ISF, something that the GoI does not frequently reciprocate. National Security Advisor (NSA) Muwwafaq Rubaie suggested that the GOI should prohibit CLCs south of Baghdad except for the area between Hillah and Baghdad. Deputy Prime Minister Barham Salih intervened that this issue, the CLCs and how they will evolve, needs to be addressed carefully and thoughtfully. PM Maliki closed the discussion by announcing that next week's MCNS would be entirely devoted to discussion of the CLCs and their further development.

Al Qaeda

17. (S) The Intel Director of the MOI (MOI-I) read a report on Al Qaeda in Iraq. The key points were:
--AQI is on the defensive and has been driven from most cities, in part due to CLCs cooperation with MNF and ISF;
--AQI is still a threat, however, and is re-organizing itself;
--AQI is trying to infiltrate other groups like the CLCs; and, most worrying,
--AQI is trying to foment violence in ethnically-diverse Kirkuk.

¶8. (S) MOI-I assessed that AQI will also likely try to use suicide attacks and targeted assassinations in Baghdad, Karbala and Najaf. He stated that more than military operations are needed against AQI - sources of personnel and funding, both domestic and foreign, must be disrupted. Finally, there are splits in AQI that present an opportunity for exploitation - Intel efforts against AQI should focus on disrupting its re-organization efforts and working with CLCs to gather useful Intel about AQI.

Foreign Fighters

¶9. (S) The PM noted that a report on Foreign Fighters coming into Iraq, especially from Saudi Arabia, should not be glossed over. He called on everyone to pay attention to it, read it closely, and take it seriously. The CG responded that the intelligence on AQI and Foreign Fighters drives the MNF's-I's work. He then briefed the PM and MCNS on MNF's-I's interpretation of the situation: --the flow of Foreign Fighters from Syria has decreased substantially over the last six months; --Syria is stopping Foreign Fighters, that is, they are being somewhat cooperative, but more must be done; --MNF's-I's killing of Foreign Fighter leaders has affected the flow of fighters; --source countries are preventing potential fighters from leaving for Iraq - but much more needs to be done --regardless of success to date, AQI remains a danger to Iraqi security and MNF-I forces; --MNF-I and GOI services must share useful intelligence to continue to disrupt and defeat AQI.

¶10. (S) On the last point, NSA Rubaie noted that forty percent of Foreign Fighters come from North Africa - the Iraqi intelligence services and the MFA must engage with their North African counterparts to have North African countries stop the flow of Foreign Fighters, repeating successful efforts made with Saudi Arabia, Syria, and Jordan.

SPD

¶11. (S) Maliki announced that ForMin Zebari and Vice President Adil Abd al-Mahdi had briefed the COR on the Strategic Partnership Declaration that day, November 25.

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Maliki noted that this was not to get a vote up or down on the declaration, but simply to strengthen support for it. Zebari noted that the declaration outlines the intentions of the United States and will form the basis for a future security relationship agreement to be negotiated later. He characterized the three-hour information session as successful, taking place in a generally positive atmosphere.

Returnees

¶12. (S) the Minister of State for National Security (MSNS) Shirwan al-Waeli outlined plans for the proximate return of about 1,000 Iraqis from Syria to Baghdad. He said security measures were in place, but some air support from MNF-I would be desirable. The MFA noted that many of these people might seek to return to homes now occupied by others, raising the question of what to do in that case. Waeli MSNS replied that it would be difficult to force them back into their houses, and that the Iraqi Red Crescent should be involved to help in helping these returnees. The PM suggested that money should be provided to returnees to help them manage.

Training and Equipping ISF

¶13. (S) NSA Rubaie outlined problems with the training and equipping of ISF that the High-Level Working Group on Provincial Iraqi Control (PIC) had uncovered, threatening to delay PIC in some cases. Bristling, the MOD responded that his ministry was not interfering with the training process or the provision of equipment to ISF.

FMS Money for MOI

¶14. (S) NSA Rubaie noted that USD500 million of FMS funding needed to be transferred from the Ministry of Finance to the MOI. After some discussion, it was agreed that this was a procedural issue that should be resolved quickly so that MOI could proceed with procuring needed equipment. The CG reminded the PM and others that resolving this issue was very important - the U.S. Congress is not likely to allocate more funds for Iraqi equipment if the GOI is not spending what had been allocated to it already. The CG stated that no 2007 Iraqi funds have been spent to date on the equipping of the police forces.

Brain Drain

¶15. (S) Segueing into retention problems the entire government faces, MOD noted that doctors and pilots are leaving for more lucrative employment elsewhere. The MOI echoed these complaints, adding engineers to the list. The PM said the answer was to make sure the compensation packages, including pensions and salaries, were competitive.

Scrap Weapons

¶16. (C) The MSNS outlined efforts the GOI was taking to collect and turn into scrap items that could be used for improvised weapons. Not all could be melted, so steps were being taken to render them inoperable for any military use and then sell them for scrap to be re-cycled in industrial production. He noted the importance of controlling these "dual-use" items that could be employed by terrorists groups if acquired.

De-Baathification Law

¶17. (S) NSA Rubaie noted that the earlier draft Law on Justice and Accountability had been pulled back from the COR and that the revised draft had had its second reading. Dr. Rubaie, a neurosurgeon by profession, likened passage of the De-Baathification law to "a birth with forceps".
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